

TEN FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
Hosting a State Department Foreign Exchange Scholarship Student

1. Who can be a host family?



Host families represent the diversity of American culture. Host families are of varied economic, religious and racial backgrounds and include working parents, couples without children, singles and single parents, adoptive parents, and empty nesters. Host families live in all 50 states of the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii. You don't need to have teenagers to host – you can host if you have young children, adult children, or no children at all. If yours is a non-traditional household interested in sharing your home with a foreign exchange scholarship student, organizations will generally consider your application to host following special selection procedures.

2. Are families compensated monetarily for hosting an exchange student?

In the spirit of volunteerism, host families do not receive monetary compensation for their kind hospitality. However, when people volunteer to become a host family, they are entitled to a \$50 per month tax deduction. On February 25, 2003, Rep. Robert Andrews (D-NJ) introduced legislation that would increase the monthly tax deduction for families hosting high school exchange students from \$50 to \$200. This legislation is still pending.

3. Do scholarship students receive financial assistance?

Scholarship students benefit from two allowances – the monthly stipend and the incidentals allowance. The monthly stipend is a personal allowance that may be used for social activities or for items such as toiletries and cosmetics. Since exchange students are not permitted to work, under the terms of their J visas, this allowance is meant to offset host family expenditures. The incidentals allowance is a lump sum amount to help cover the cost of school or program related items. This is another attempt to offset host family expenditures. The incidentals allowance may be used for a number of purposes, such as school activity fees, special equipment that a student needs for a school or extracurricular activity, or a yearbook. In some situations, it may be used for clothing that is necessitated by a climate different from that in the student's home country. Although students are prohibited from holding a job, they can do odd jobs to earn extra money. Many scholarship students baby-sit, wash cars, mow lawns and find a variety of creative ways to pay for their personal expenses.





4. How are host families prepared?

Organizations that have received grants to administer State Department scholarship programs are required to conduct local orientations for all families hosting students before the students arrive. This is an opportunity for host families to ask questions and learn about the program. Host families are also provided with resources to help them get acquainted with the students' home countries and cultures.

5. Why does the U.S. State Department offer scholarships to high school students from foreign countries?

One of the foreign policy goals of the State Department is to expand communication between the people of the United States and people from other countries to promote mutual understanding and respect. Youth exchange programs are among a number of projects that give foreign citizens the opportunity to live and study in the United States for one year. The State Department also funds scholarships for American teenagers to travel to other countries. One of these programs for Americans is the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange program.

6. What countries are the students from? Who should I contact if I want to host a student from a particular country?

The Youth Programs Division currently administers four academic year programs, each of which targets different countries.

- Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX): **Germany**
<http://exchanges.state.gov/education/citizens/students/europe/german.htm>

Contact: Shalita Jones: JonesSA@state.gov

- Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX): **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan** – countries of the former Soviet Union
<http://exchanges.state.gov/education/citizens/students/eurasia/flex.htm>

Contact: Linda Beach: BeachLF@state.gov

- Youth Exchange and Study (YES): **Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Brunei, Egypt, Gaza, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel (Arab Community), Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, West Bank, and Yemen, Brunei, Ghana and Thailand** – countries of the Arab and Muslim world
<http://exchanges.state.gov/education/citizens/students/ena/yes.htm>

Contact: Matt O'Rourke: ORourkeMM@state.gov

- American Serbia and Montenegro Youth Leadership Exchange (A-SMYLE) : **Serbia and Montenegro**
http://exchanges.state.gov/education/citizens/students/europe/a_smyle.htm

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7. What makes State Department scholarship students different from other exchange students?



Unlike students who pay a fee to come to the United States on a private exchange, State Department scholarship students are selected through merit-based competitions. They are here to learn about concepts of American life such as student government, debate, citizen empowerment, volunteerism, community action and a free market economy so they can take these principles back to their home communities to share with others. Organizations that place students with host families (“placement organizations”) are provided with funds to conduct “enhancement activities” to enable students to gain experiences that will help them benefit their societies.

8. Do State Department scholarship students have special responsibilities?

Cultural Presentations

Since students are on U.S. Government scholarships, their responsibilities during the exchange period greatly exceed those of students who come to the U.S. under private, fee-paying programs. State Department scholarship students are expected to be ambassadors from their countries and to teach Americans with whom they interact about the culture of their home countries. Before arriving in the U.S., scholarship students are told to be prepared to give presentations and to bring photos and artifacts with them to support their cultural presentations in their American school and for community groups. Upon returning home, they also are expected to be ambassadors from the U.S. to teach their friends, families, neighbors and community members about life in the U.S. Many scholarship students have written articles for local newspapers, have been interviewed on TV and radio, and have made presentations about American life in their home schools and universities.





Community Service

Most scholarship students are expected to participate in a variety of community service activities, such as working at homeless shelters, talking to senior citizens, helping at Special Olympic events, at libraries, and for local newspapers. The Youth Programs Division believes that participating in volunteer activities provides a way for students to give something back to their host communities. In addition, it helps the students gain a better understanding of volunteerism, a concept that may be foreign to many of these young people.

9. How are scholarship students prepared for their year in the U.S.?

Prior to departure, scholarship students participate in an orientation program in their home countries. The major goal of the pre-departure orientation is to prepare students for what lies ahead. In addition to a general overview and information about cultural differences they may encounter, students are told about program rules such as the prohibition against alcohol, drugs and driving, and the possibility that they may not be granted a diploma by their American school. After arriving in the U.S., students participate in another orientation conducted regionally or locally by their respective placement organizations. This post-arrival orientation offers them information about their host state, school and community. They are also told about the organization's policies and given a schedule of program-related activities.



10. Why should an American family host a State Department scholarship student?



Since 9/11, when many Americans have come to realize the importance of reaching out to other nations to overcome misunderstandings and to create bonds based on commonalities rather than differences. Welcoming a foreign exchange scholarship student into your home provides you and your family with a unique opportunity to exchange ideas, share experiences and learn about each other's countries. More often than not, this exchange of ideas and values between American families and foreign youth help to counter misperceptions and stereotypes that have become a global phenomenon that we struggle with daily.

Youth exchange programs sponsored by the State Department offer an unprecedented opportunity for Americans and foreign students to bridge cultural divides and unveil mysteries that have been hidden for so long. American host families can help scholarship students learn about and test concepts of democracy, community service and civil society, possibly for the first time. While Americans tend to take many freedoms for granted, some of these concepts and values such as open elections, student government and volunteerism may be new and exciting experiences a host family can share with a visiting student. Likewise, American host families have a wonderful opportunity to learn about a new culture and traditions and to create friendships that can last forever.

Host Family Reflections



We learned and grew, not just shared & taught. – Muller family, Wilder, ID

Hulkar added value to my life as well as to my children's life. – Tassi family, Orlando, FL

It has been a wonderful experience! Olga has become an integral part of our family. We have received much more that we have given. – Belba-Gonzalez family, San Jose, CA.

I feel that I need to let you know that my experience with Leyla has been so wonderful. She fit in well with my family

that some would have to wonder if she was part of our family. I can honestly speak for the many faculty, staff and students here at BHS that Leyla has left an absolute, wonderful legacy here at BHS. We all love her so much and will miss her greatly. – Deanna Griffey, Booneville, AR.

We really enjoyed being host parents, especially our last 3 FLEX students. – Everingham family, Wichita, KS

My husband and I both feel that when Artem gets back home and has a chance to reflect on his stay here in America it will be one of the best things in his life. Sometimes we are too close to something to see how really wonderful it is and it takes a chance to look back before we really see clearly. I think this program is excellent in helping these students discover that we are all basically the same and I would encourage anyone to take advantage of a program such as this to experience the cultural exchange between two different countries. I know we learned many wonderful things about Russia. – Welch family, Rye, CO

